



NEW

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Glory of Bharath » Bharatheeya Samskrithi

Yajur Vedic Upanishads - III **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad**

"Aham Brahma Asmi-I am Brahman"

The **Brihadaranyaka** Upanishad is one of the older, "primary" (mukhya) Upanishads. It is contained within the Shatapatha Brahmana. It is widely known for its philosophical statements, and is ascribed to Yajnavalkya. Its name is literally translated as "great-forest-teaching". It includes three sections, namely, Madhu Kanda, Muni Kanda (or Yajnavalkya Kanda) and Khila Kanda. The Madhu Kanda explains the teachings of the basic identity of the individual or jiva and the Atman. Muni Kanda includes the conversations between the sage Yajnavalkya and his wife, Maitreyi. Various methods of worship and meditation are dealt in the Khila Kanda. The doctrine of "neti neti" ("neither this, nor that") and a often quoted verse, "Asato Maa" is found in this Upanishad.



asato mā sadgamaya
tamaso mā jyotirgamaya
mṛityor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya
om śhānti śhānti śhānti - bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣada 1.3.28

Translation:

Lead Us From the Unreal To the Real,
Lead Us From Darkness To Light,
Lead Us From Death To Immortality,
OM (the universal sound of God)

Let There Be Peace Peace Peace. - Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.3.28.

Dialog between Maitreyi and Yajnavalkya

The Dialog between Maitreyi and Yajnavalkya exploring the nature of Bhrahman as non-dual, all-inclusive and absolute, is an inspiring episode from Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. One day Yajnavalkya, when he wished to embrace another mode of life, said: "Maitreyi, my dear, I am going to renounce this life to become a monk. Let me make a final settlement between you and Katyayani."

Maitreyi said: "Venerable Sir, if indeed the whole earth full of wealth belonged to me, would I be immortal through that or not?" "No," replied Yajnavalkya, "your life would be just like that of people who have plenty. Of Immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth." Then Maitreyi said: "What should I do with that which would not make me immortal? Tell me, venerable Sir, of that alone which you know to be the only means of attaining Immortality." Yajnavalkya replied: "My dear, you have been my beloved even before and now you have resolved to know what is after my heart. If you wish, my dear, I shall explain it to you. As I explain it, meditate on what I say."

"For when there is duality, as it were, then one sees another, one smells another, one tastes another, one speaks to another, one hears another, one thinks of another, one touches another, one knows another. But when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Self, then what should he see and through what, what should he smell and through what, what should he taste and through what, what should he speak and through what, what should he hear and through what, what should he think and through what, what should he touch and through what, what should he know and through what? Through what should one know That Owing to which all this is known?"

"This Self is That which has been described as 'Not this, not this (neti, neti).' It is imperceptible, for It is never perceived; undecaying, for It never decays; unattached, for It never attaches Itself; unfettered, for It never feels pain and never suffers injury.

Through what, O Maitreyi, should one know the Knower? "Thus you have the instruction given to you. This much, indeed, is the means to Immortality."

Having said this, Yajnavalkya renounced home.

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The Dialog between **Gargi and Yajnavalkya** is one of the inspiring episodes from **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad** exploring the nature of the Absolute. Once Janaka, the emperor of Videha, performed a sacrifice in which gifts were freely distributed among the priests. Brahmin scholars from the countries of Kuru and Panchala were assembled there. Emperor Janaka wished to know which of these brahmins was the most erudite Vedic scholar. So he confined a thousand cows in a pen and fastened on the horns of each ten padas of gold.

He then said to them: "Venerable brahmins, let him among you who is the best Vedic scholar drive these cows home."

None of the brahmins dared. Then Yajnavalkya said to one of his pupils: "Dear Samsrava, drive these cows home." Taking the command from his guru, he drove the cows away.

The brahmins were furious and challenged Yajnavalkya for a debating relating the knowledge of Vedas. Many illustrious sages like Asvala, the priest of Janaka, Artabhaga, Bhujyu, Ushasta, Uddalaka challenges him and Yajnavalkya answers all their questions and defeats them in the debate. Among them was the women sage Gargi, the daughter of Vachaknu, who is wise and well versed in Vedas.

Gargi Questions Yajnavalkya

Gargi, the daughter of Vachaknu, questioned Yajnavalkya.

"Yajnavalkya," said she, "if all this is pervaded by water, by what, pray, is water pervaded?" "By air, O Gargi," replied Yajnavalkya.

"By what, pray, is air pervaded?" "By the sky, O Gargi."

"By what is the sky pervaded?" "By the world of the gandharvas, O Gargi."

"By what is the world of the gandharvas pervaded?" "By the world of the sun, O Gargi."

"By what is the world of the sun pervaded?" "By the world of the moon, O Gargi."

"By what is the world of the moon pervaded?" "By the world of the stars, O Gargi."

"By what is the world of the stars pervaded?" "By the world of the gods, O Gargi."

"By what is the world of the gods pervaded?" "By the world of Indra, O Gargi."

"By what is the world of Indra pervaded?" "By the World of Virij, O Gargi."

"By what is the World of Virij pervaded?" "By the World of Hiranyagarbha, O Gargi."

"By what, pray, is the World of Hiranyagarbha pervaded?" "Do not, O Gargi," said he, "question too much, lest your head should fall off. You are questioning too much about a deity about whom we should not ask too much. Do not ask too much, O Gargi." Thereupon Gargi, the daughter of Vachaknu, held her peace.

After that, Uddalaka, the son of Aruna debates with Yajnavalkya. Yajnavalkya answers all the questions put forth by Uddalaka. Then Gargi says to the assembly: "Venerable brahmins, I shall ask him two questions. If he answers me these, then none of you can defeat him in discussing Brahman."

The brahmins said: "Ask, O Gargi."

The two questions of Gargi

Gargi said: "O Yajnavalkya, I shall ask you two questions: As a man of Kasi or the King of Videha, scion of a heroic line, might string his unstrung bow, take in his hand two bamboo-tipped arrows highly painful to enemies and approach his enemies closely, even so, O Yajnavalkya, do I confront you with two questions. Answer me these." "Ask, O Gargi."

Gargi said: "O Yajnavalkya, what pervades that Sutra which is above heaven and below the earth, which is heaven and earth as well as what is between them and which-they say-was, is and will be?"

Yajnavalkya said: "That, O Gargi, which is above heaven and below the earth, which is heaven and earth as well as what is between them and which-they say-was, is and will be, is pervaded by the unmanifested akasa."

said: "I bow to you, O Yajnavalkya. You have fully answered this question of mine. Now brace yourself for the other."

Gargi said: "Yajnavalkya, what pervades that Sutra which is above heaven and below the earth, which is heaven and earth as well as what is between them and which-they say-was, is and will be?" He said: "That, O Gargi, which is above heaven and below the earth, which is heaven and earth as well as what is between them and which-they say-was, is and will be, is pervaded by the unmanifested akasa." "What pervades the akasa?"

Yajnavalkya said: "That, O Gargi, the knowers of Brahman call the Imperishable. It is neither gross nor subtle, neither short nor long, neither red nor moist; It is neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor akasa; It is unattached; It is without taste or smell, without eyes or ears, without tongue or mind; It is non-effulgent, without vital breath or mouth, without measure and without exterior or interior. It does not eat anything, nor is it eaten by anyone."

"Verily, under the mighty rule of this Imperishable, O Gargi, the sun and moon are held in their respective positions. Under the mighty rule of this Imperishable, O Gargi, heaven and earth are held in their respective positions. Under the mighty rule of this Imperishable, O Gargi, moments, muhurtas (about forty-eight minutes), days and nights, fortnights, months, seasons and years are held in their respective positions. Under the mighty rule of this Imperishable, O Gargi, some rivers flow eastward from the white mountains, others flowing westward continue in that direction and still others keep to their respective courses. Under the mighty rule of this Imperishable, O Gargi, men praise those who give, the gods depend upon the sacrificer and the Manes upon the Darvi offering."

"Whosoever in this world, O Gargi, without knowing this Imperishable, offers oblations, performs sacrifices and practises austerities, even for many thousands of years, finds all such acts but perishable. Whosoever, O Gargi, departs from this world without knowing this Imperishable is miserable. But he, O Gargi, who departs from this world after knowing the Imperishable is a knower of Brahman."

"Verily, that Imperishable, O Gargi, is never seen but is the Seer; It is never heard, but is the Hearer; It is never thought of, but is the Thinker; It is never known, but is the Knower. There is no other seer but This, there is no other hearer but This, there is no other thinker but This, there is no other knower but This. By this imperishable, O Gargi, is the unmanifested akasa pervaded."

Then said Gargi: "Venerable brahmins, you may consider yourselves fortunate if you can get off from him through bowing to him. None of you, I believe, will defeat him in arguments about Brahman. Thus Yajnavalkya comes out as a victor.

Uddalaka was a great rishi. He had a son by name Svetaketu.



After giving him the sacred thread at the proper age, the rishi called him one day and said, "Svetaketu, proceed to the house of a guru and living there as a student, learn the Vedas well; for, there is none in our family who is not learned in the Vedas." As directed by his father, Svetaketu went to a gurukula or the ashrama of a guru and studied the Vedas under the guru. He returned home when he was twenty-four years of age, a proud scholar. He thought that there remained little else for him to know.

His father was a shrewd man. He at once knew that his son's head was swollen with pride. He wanted to correct him. One day he called him and said, "Son, I think you feel you have mastered all knowledge on the face of the earth; but, have you ever learnt that knowledge, by which we can hear what is not heard; perceive what cannot be perceived, and know what cannot be known?"

Svetaketu was a trifle upset. He asked humbly, "Sire, won't you tell me what that knowledge is? Seeing that his son was coming round, the father said, "My dear, let me explain myself fully. When, for instance, you know one clod of Clay, you can know all that is made of clay. When you know a nugget of gold, you can know all ornaments made of gold, because the essence of it is gold. When you know a nail-cutter, you can know all that is made of iron, the truth being that all of them are iron. The only difference is in their names and forms. That is the knowledge I am talking about." Svetaketu said, "Sir, my venerable gurus did not perhaps know it.

Had they known, why would they have not taught it to me? Please teach it to me."

Uddalaka said, "All right. I shall teach you;- listen. In the beginning of creation, O child, the Sat or True Being alone existed. It had neither equal nor second. It thought, 'Let me multiply myself and create beings.' He first created Tejas or fire god. The fire god wanted to multiply himself. He created the water god. That is why whenever anybody weeps or perspires, water comes out. The water god wanted to multiply himself and created the food god. Then the True Being thought, 'I have now created these three gods. Now I shall enter them as Jivatma and assume name and form!'

'Later on, the True Being thought, 'I shall now make each of them enter into the other.' "Having thus entered them with His living spirit, It assumed names and forms like Agni, Indra etc. The True Being made them enter into one another, again. O child, now learn what each became thereafter. Whatever was fire showed as red. Whatever was water showed as white and whatever was food showed as black. Thus you will see the word Agni vanishes in fire. This change has only been in name. The three primary forms Tejas, Apas or water and Annam or food are the only true forms.

The red colour of the Sun is Tejas; its white colour is water; its black colour is the food or the earth. Thus the name Aditya for Sun should vanish. It is only a conventional name. "You have now learnt from me, child, how every deity and element is descended from the three primary forms of the True Being.

"He or the Sat alone is all-name, because every name is His name.

He alone is all-power, because every power is His. All the forms that belong to others are reflections of His form. He is the only one without an equal or second. He is the best of all. He being the Chief, He is called Sat or the True Being. Knowing Him we know everything else. When a man sleeps soundly, he comes into contact with the Sat. When man dies, his speech merges in the mind, the mind in his breath, his breath in the fire and the fire in the Highest God, the True Being. Thus the soul or Jiva-Atman is deathless. All the universe is controlled by the Sat. He pervades it all. He is the destroyer of all. He is full of perfect qualities. O Svetaketu, you are not that God.

Svetaketu asked, "Sire, please teach me more."

Uddalaka said, "The bees, my child, collect the honey from different flowers and mix them in the hive. Now, honeys of different flowers cannot know one from the other.

"My child, the rivers that run in the different directions rise from the sea and go back to the sea. Yet the sea remains the same. The rivers, while in the sea, cannot identify themselves as one particular river or another. So also creatures that have come from Sat know not that they have come from that Sat, although they become one or the other again and again."

Uddalaka then asked his son to bring a fig fruit. When he did so, Uddalaka asked him to break it. He broke it. Uddalaka: "What do you see in it?"

Svetaketu "I see small seeds."

Uddalaka "Break one of the seeds and say what you see."

Svetaketu "Nothing Sir."

Uddalaka: "You are unable to see the minute particles of the seed after breaking it. Now, the big fig tree is born out of that essence of that particle. Like that, the True Being is the essence of all creation. " Uddalaka asked his son to bring some salt and put it into a cup of water and bring the cup next morning. Svetaketu

did so.

Uddalaka: "You put the salt into the water in this cup. Will you take the salt out?"

Svetaketu "I am unable to find the salt; for it has dissolved."

Uddalaka "Taste a drop from the surface of this water." Svetaketu "It is saltish."

Uddalaka "Now taste a drop from the middle of the cup."

Svetaketu "It tastes the same, saltish."

Uddalaka: "Now taste a drop from the bottom."

Svetaketu "It is saltish all the same."

Uddalaka "Now child, you do not see the salt, although it is certainly in the water. Even so, the True Being is present everywhere in this universe, although you do not see Him. He is the essence of all, and the desired of all. He is known to the subtlest intellect."

Svetaketu became humble thereafter, and became a great rishi himself in course of time. This is a story from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.



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